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Tribute to Carl S. Hawkins

Reese Hansen

When Carl Hawkins died on April 25, 2010, the J. Reuben Clark Law School lost a dear friend and colleague, mentor and leader. My first acquaintance with Carl was in 1973—the inaugural year of the BYU Law School. I was then a newly admitted lawyer practicing in Salt Lake City. Carl had joined the BYU law faculty as the key appointment on the founding faculty of the just-opened law school. Because there were no second- or third-year law students at the Law School to assist the full-time faculty in teaching legal writing to the first-year students, five young practicing attorneys in Salt Lake City were invited to serve, essentially as a graduate assistants, in teaching legal writing. I was fortunate to be one of the five and was assigned to assist Carl in teaching legal writing to the students in his small-section Torts class. Carl was a master teacher—both to his Torts students and to his “graduate assistant.” His patient leadership and work with me as his assistant was one of the important factors in my decision to spend my professional life in legal education.

When I became a full-time faculty member at the law school in 1974, Carl had the wonderful skill of making me feel like a full-fledged faculty colleague, while generously sharing the lessons of his experience as a seasoned and distinguished teacher/scholar. Over the years I watched Carl mentor other new law teachers in the same patient manner. Carl became the first and most respected advisor to his faculty colleagues. He was a teacher of teachers.

Carl was always the “senior” member of our faculty. His role in faculty deliberations was always of critical importance. In both faculty committee meetings and meetings of the whole faculty, Carl’s clear and careful explanations of carefully considered opinions always provided a magnificent example of what it means to be a member of a faculty, and what kinds of matters are important and which are trivial. His participation in faculty discussion always demonstrated how to make a point without demeaning a different position held by another. Paraphrasing a once-popular commercial, “When Carl spoke, people listened.” Throughout his tenure on the faculty, Carl’s stature among the faculty was unequaled.

Carl’s main love was teaching. He was widely respected by

students as a knowledgeable, effective teacher. His teaching was enhanced by a lifetime of highly-regarded scholarship. That scholarship brought him national attention, and resulted in his appointment as chair of the Florida legislative committee studying the liability insurance crises in that state. That committee, the first of its kind, produced a historic report which has become the basis of legislative decision making on this important public issue in Florida and other states. Carl became the first faculty member of the Law School to be named to an endowed chair when he was appointed the first occupant of the Guy Anderson Chair in 1978.

When Dean Rex E. Lee took a leave from the Law School to accept appointment as an Assistant Attorney General in the U.S. Department of Justice in 1975, Carl was the obvious and unanimous choice of his colleagues to serve as dean. Being dean was not one of the things Carl wanted to do. In fact it was something he particularly did not want to do. In spite of the fact that he knew the assignment would take him away from his professional loves—teaching and writing—Carl agreed to serve as Acting Dean because his colleagues wanted him to lead the Law School. That service lasted until January 1977 when Rex Lee returned to the Law School and resumed the dean's duties. When Rex resigned from the faculty in 1981 to become the United States Solicitor General, Carl was called upon again to lead the Law School, and in August 1981 Carl was named the second Dean of the BYU Law School. In the years of his service as acting dean and dean, the law school passed through several critical stages, including formal accreditation by the American Bar Association and approval for membership in the Association of American Law Schools and for a Chapter of the Order of the Coif. Carl's stature in American legal education coupled with his steady and wise leadership were essential for successful completion of these important steps in the maturation of our new law school. The fact that Carl did not relish administrative work but did it with such consummate skill endeared him all the more to faculty and students alike.

All of these important accomplishments, however, are overshadowed by the one most important characteristic of Carl: He is simply one of the finest human beings I have ever known.